

ON THE MOVE

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE
SAY ABOUT MIGRATION?



AFRICA
INLAND MISSION

Introduction

People are on the move. If you turn on the television, open a newspaper, look at the number of different restaurants on your High Street or count the number of different languages you can hear on a bus or railway journey, you will realise that we are becoming a more diverse country. People are moving to the UK and Europe from all over the world. Some of the people arriving on our shores are escaping war, famine and persecution, others are coming here to join family members, or to study, or to look for business opportunities.

At times it may seem that mass migration is a new phenomenon, but as it says in Ecclesiastes 1:9, 'there is nothing new under the sun'. People have been on the move since Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. Throughout the Old Testament the people of Israel were often either on the move from one place to another, or they were in exile, or living under the threat of occupation. The New Testament records that, for a few early years in his childhood, Jesus was a refugee when his parents took him to Egypt to escape King Herod's murderous soldiers. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise to us to learn that the Bible has much to say on the subject of migration and in particular the responsibility of Christians towards people who have migrated to their area. The Hebrew word 'Ger', which is often translated as alien, stranger or sojourner, appears 83 times in the Old Testament. Jesus was clear that he expected his followers to treat their neighbours as themselves.

A deeper look at the biblical narrative reveals how God continued to work through his people as they moved around the Middle East. In the three studies that follow, we are going to reflect on how the theme of migration is woven into the biblical narrative, along with what the Bible says about migrants and, in particular, how as Christians we should welcome and care for them. Lastly, we will consider how recent patterns in migration are opening up new opportunities for outreach among people who have arrived on our doorstep from areas of the world that up to now have been difficult to reach.



Throughout the Old Testament the people of Israel were often either on the move from one place to another, or they were in exile, or living under the threat of occupation.

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Study 1: Migration in the Bible

Introduction

Throughout the Old Testament we often see the theme of migration woven into the narrative. People moved for various reasons. Joseph was moved by force when he was trafficked to Egypt to become a servant, and so were the Israelites when they were taken into Exile. Or some, like Abram, moved in response to God's calling. Whatever the reason for their travels, these events were all part of God's plan for the overall redemption of mankind.



Getting started: Have you or any of your family moved recently, either within Europe or to Europe from further afield? Alternatively, do you know people who have moved recently?

Discussion questions



1. Read Genesis 12:1 and Hebrews 11:9. Can you think of some of the things which Abram's move may have caused him to give up?



The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."
(Genesis 12:1)

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. **(Hebrews 11:9)**



2. Read Genesis 12:2-3. How do we benefit today as a result of Abram's obedience to God?



*"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."* **(Genesis 12:2-3)**



3. Read Job 12:23. It is clear from this verse that Job saw God's hand behind the political events and migration of people in his time. Do you think God works in this way today?



*He makes nations great, and destroys them;
he enlarges nations, and disperses them.* **(Job 12:23)**



4. By the time the biblical narrative moved to the New Testament, people in the Middle East were more mobile. For example, we read the following about the day of Pentecost. **Read Acts 2:5-7.**



Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?"

- When Peter started preaching how do you think the fact that his audience had come from many different countries helped the initial spread of the gospel?



5. Read Acts 17:26-27.

- In what way is verse 26 similar to Job 12:23?
- What point do you think Paul was trying to make in verse 27?

LEADER'S NOTES: If your group find this question difficult to answer, encouraging them to consider if Paul was implying travel and migration may make people open and receptive to the gospel.



*From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. **(Acts 17:26-27)***



Bringing it home: Could it be, that as a result of you moving to a new area or country, or you coming into contact with people who have moved to your area, that God is leading you to people who have not heard the gospel? Is he prompting you or your church to do anything about this?



To help your reflection, you may find this article helpful:
eu.aimint.org/befriending

Study 2: Serving refugees

Introduction

Do you sometimes think it can be hard to relate the Bible to current events in the news? If so, you may be encouraged to know that when it comes to the topic of refugees the Bible has much to say. In this study we are going to consider how we could respond to refugees arriving in our communities in light of some passages from the Old and New Testaments.



Getting started: What does the word 'refugee' mean to you?

Leader's notes: The UNHCR defines refugees as follows:

"Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country."

<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-is-a-refugee.html>

Discussion questions



1. Read Leviticus 19:34. Do you think this instruction was just for the Israelites years ago or does it still apply to us today?



The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:34)

LEADER'S NOTES: As your group consider the second part of this verse you may find it helpful to direct them to **1 Chronicles 29:15**.



2. As Christians, we are following Jesus, someone who knows what it is like to be a refugee. **Read Matthew 2:13-18.**



When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance

with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

*"A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more."*

(Matthew 2:13-18)

Jesus' family became refugees when he was very young when they fled to Egypt to escape Herod's soldiers. At that time there was a significant Jewish community in Egypt and Joseph may have expected to be safe there. However, their journey was almost certainly hazardous, and Joseph would have had little or no time to prepare for his family's night-time departure.

- If you suddenly had to flee your home in the middle of the night with just what you could carry, what would you choose to take?
- How do you think Mary and Joseph felt as they hastily prepared to flee to Egypt?

We don't know what kind of reception Joseph and his family received in Egypt, but it is probably safe to assume that they were welcomed and shown kindness. What we can be sure of though, is that Jesus expects his followers to show compassion to those in need.

As Stephan Bauman says in his book *Seeking Refuge*: **'Jesus not only was a refugee; He also taught his disciples in many ways that inform how we can respond to refugees.'**

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- Stephan Bauman



3. Read Matthew 25:37-40. How do you think Jesus expects us to react to refugees who have had to flee from countries in Africa or other parts of the world?



"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'"

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

(Matthew 25:37-40)



4. Jesus and his family were not the only biblical characters who had to flee from violence. **Read 1 Kings 19:1-8.**



Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. (1 Kings 19:1-8)

- Do you think that some of the refugees who have fled war and oppression to come to the UK and Europe may feel like Elijah did?
- How did the angel help Elijah?
- What was the result of the help which the angel gave Elijah?

LEADER'S NOTES: Encourage your group to consider the encouragement that the angel gave Elijah as well as the food and note how the angel's assistance helped Elijah complete the journey he had ahead of him.



5. Could your answers to the above three questions influence how we help people who are fleeing violence and persecution today?



Bringing it home: Are there things that you or your church could be doing to reach out to refugees who may have arrived in your local area?



Helpful resources relating to refugees:

welcomechurches.org

borderlessafrica.org

howwilltheyhear.net

Study 3: A house of prayer for all nations

Introduction

At the start of his book *Let the Nations be Glad*, John Piper says the following: 'Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't.' In the book he develops this theme that the aim of mission is that people from all the nations will come together to worship God. The title of John Piper's book is a quote from **Psalms 67:3-4**:

'May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy'

If the above is true, then by implication a sign of effective mission work in ethnically diverse parts UK and Europe should be thriving multicultural churches.



Getting started: How would you define a thriving multicultural church?

Discussion questions



1. In the Bible we are constantly reminded that although initially God chose to work through the people of Israel, his plan of salvation was always for everyone. Examples of this are his promise to Abram that he would be the father of many nations and the following passage in Isaiah: **Read Isaiah 56:6-7.**



*And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord
to minister to him,
to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant—
these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations. (Isaiah 56:6-7)*

- Does the membership of your local church reflect the ethnic mix of the community in which it is located?



2. Paul who was a Jew, has sometimes been called the Apostle to the Gentiles because, as well as preaching to the Jews, he was committed to reaching out to people from all races. In Acts 17 we have a record of part of a sermon which he gave to a Greek audience. **Read Acts 17:22-31.**



Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: *“People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.*

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:22-31)

- What did Paul do to make the gospel more understandable for his Greek audience?
- Does what Paul says in any way compromise or change the basic gospel message?
- Do you think there are lessons which churches located in multi-cultural areas can learn from these verses today?



3. Read Matthew 28:16-20. These verses at the end of Matthew’s gospel are known as the Great Commission and they have inspired many missionaries to take the gospel to parts of Africa where Christ is not known. This has often been a difficult and at times dangerous task. Now recent trends in migration are bringing some people from these hard-to-reach locations to our doorstep in Europe.



Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:16-20)

- What do you think Jesus meant when he said, ‘go and make disciples’?
- Is there a difference between a disciple and a believer?



Bringing it home: As a group watch this video about AIM's diaspora ministry: eu.aimint.org/diaspora-ministry.

Discuss your thoughts.

- Are there practical steps which you or your church could be doing locally to enable people from different cultures to hear the gospel?